SWITZERLAND: A SAFE HAVEN FOR CIVILIAN REFUGEES AND MILITARY INTERNEES DURING THE NAZI ERA

SUMMARY/SYNOPSIS

Objective: This **DISPLAY exhibit** of **128** pages should demonstrate with **philatelic** items, **historic descriptions** and **personal historical documents** the many problems encountered by and in **neutral Switzerland** during the Nazi Era, when dealing with **everyday life** and **correspondence** of **Emigrants, Refugees & Military Internees** who **sought asylum** in Switzerland while the country ultimately was completely **surrounded by Nazi Germany and its allies.**

***Historic Facts*:** The title page serves as introduction to the longstanding tradition of "Save Haven".

Organization & Outline: The exhibit is subdivided into various groups closely related to the theme. It is impossible to have balance among groups because in some cases little material was issued, while in others a lot of items are available, sometimes only changed by the camp name but with the same cancel in which case the inclusion was omitted to prevent "stacking" the exhibit.

The **Outline** on page 2 follows the groups. Since there were various types of refugees in Switzerland who were either under the jurisdiction of the Federal Police and Justice Department or the Swiss Army, a special explanation was developed.

*** Mail from/to Emigrants & Refugees who are under Federal Police Department jurisdiction:** The "Nazi Era" remark indicates that civilian refugees entered Switzerland legally already between 1933 & 1938. They were called "**Emigrants**", but after 1938 they were called "**Refugees**". To identify their mail is sometimes very difficult, especially that of **Emigrants** and only **content, sender or receiver** would identify such mail since it was **not censored** as long as it did not come from or go to a refugee home or camp under military jurisdiction. To demonstrate this, one page with **common, regular, every-day mail** from/to known Emigrants is shown as is also, a **German citizenship certificate**, used on the back by Swiss authorities for **residency permission**. Not present in the exhibit is the extremely elusive blue "Z" Swiss cancel which is connected with Jewish refugee mail in Switzerland.

*** Swiss Army Mail Service, Internment Camp Mail, Internee Mail Service**: Examples show Swiss postal clerks and military Internees worked side by side and states the **administrative rules** for Swiss guard units and camp cancellation of mail.

*** June 18, 1940 - the first Internment Camp Cancels:** These are the very scarce **31 mm ø** cancels with **large Swiss cross** or **camp name** but **no "franc de port**" inscription. They were only **one week in use** when replaced by those **without** large Swiss cross or camp name but now **with "Franc de port"** inscription

*** June 25, 1940 - Censorship of Internee Mail under Military Jurisdiction: No** general mail **censorship ever existed** in Switzerland. It was **invoked** during WW II for military reasons on

that date for **both military and civilian internees in camps under military jurisdiction but escaped prisoners of war mail (Evadé mail)** was **excluded as was mail for civilian refugees in camps not** under military jurisdiction. Censored military camp mail was indicated by **three-digit numbers** (4 mm high & beginning with # "3"). When letter was opened, it was closed with white or brown (elusive) tape**. Two different tape inscriptions** were used and a red "**Zuzustellen, Feldpostdirektion**" stamp was applied on front. For reasons of **national security or possible violation of legal tender transfer**, every now and then also civilian mail was "**accidentally**" censored.

***** **July 1940 -The 2nd Group of Internment Cancels (28 mm ø) without Camp Name** shows cancels in **French, German or Italian languages** combined with various inscription combinations

***** **The 3rd Group (Definitive) of Internment Camp Cancels (28 mm ø) with Camp Name** are cancels with many variations of camp name inscriptions in **French, German or Italian languages.** Basically these were all the same cancellations of which more than 600 exist, a large majority in French language. Only **Adelboden** had two identical cancels one in German & one in French.

***** **Interned, Escaped Prisoners of War Mail** was indicated by the remark either by rubber stamp or type-written on the **front** of postal items containing the word **"EVADE"** or was mentioned in the sender's **address. Confusion** arose when mail **not indicated** as such was mixed with civilian mail and not censored, in which case this item was **returned** to the sender, indicated by **another** stamp.

***** **Special Military Security Camps & Special Purpose Camp for Internees.** There were many "**Special Internment Camps"** which had **no** special cancels except for the regular camp cancels in use at that time and location. The **largest camp** and the only one heavily fortified was **Büren an der Aare** which had **two cancels**, the mentioned one and **Büren a. d. Aare**. The **only Penal Camp** was at **Wauwilermoss** and can only be identified as such by the knowledge of being such a camp. A **special camp** was established for so-called **"Partisans"** who were **Italians** and did not **fit** into either the category of civilian or military Internees, hence, they were in this special camp under army jurisdiction and a special cancel **"Speciallager 1, Portofrei"** was issued.

***** **Higher Education Camps for Internees** were established for foreign soldiers who had to interrupt their higher education. These camps too are often only identifiable by **the address** from or to the sender and **not** by regular military camp cancel.

***** **Search for Military Internees in Switzerland**: With the **constant influx** of foreign soldiers their **where-abouts** were often **problematic** because of the hundreds of internment camps in existence; therefore, the **Swiss Information Office for Internees** was established in Bern which had **world-wide, free franc** privilege. Often mail went from **camp to camp** until an Internee was found thus creating items with **many camp cancels.**

***** **Stamp-like Labels and Postcards to Replenish the Welfare Fund for Internees**: One stamp-like **label** and **postcard** each were issued for the **French** and **Polish** Internees in order to **replenish** funds in the "**Welfare Fund for Internees"**. It was administered by the **Federal**

Commission for Internment. The **Army Mail Service relaxed** the **"no-cancellation order"** for **civilian mail or camp cancels** of such items and even furthered it.

*** 1940 - Camp for Hospitalized Foreign Soldiers** in clinics in **LEYSIN. At first, regular camp cancels** were used but later the word **"hospitalization"** was indicated in the Leysin cancel.

* **1940 - The International Bureau of Education (BIE) – Office for Intellectual Assistance to Prisoners of War, Geneva** had postage-free privilege & played an important role in everyday life of these people in regard to communication with their home country and the International Red Cross Office in Geneva. One souvenir sheet each with four different colored stamps with Pestalozzi and the same with Père Girard were issued and officially sanctioned for valid postage in connection with this institution. These stamps must be treated as forerunners.

*** Special Mail Service for Camp-detached Internees -** Great need for help especially in Agriculture. Many military and civilian Internees were permitted to work on farms and in other professions due to severe **labor shortage** in Switzerland, conditioned by mobilization of all able-bodied men. The **military Internees** could send their mail **postage-free via their "home camp"** or also **direct through regular civilian mail** but here **postage** had to be paid and no censorship. This was also the case for **Refugees** working on farms whose mail was **never censored**. Farm production was essential for Switzerland, since food import became minimal. This so-called "Wahlen Plan for more cultivation" involved everybody and there was total food rationing in Switzerland. A cover promoting this plan, meal coupons - part of the rationing and a ruling of the Federal Police permitting a refugee to work on a farm are included.

*** Mail from or to Military Internees in Swiss Camps:** The Internees were permitted to **write** to and **receive** mail from their families and friends **from all over the world**, providing the international mail service functioned. Their mail was "**postage free**" as long as regular mail (sea mail to overseas) was used. **Airmail required additional postage** which had to be paid by the Internee. **Many combinations** exist with Swiss and foreign country censorship marks and closing tapes on the same postal item.

MORE ELUSIVE ITEMS (green frame) in the exhibit:

1918 - Special Military Postcard for World War I Internees in Switzerland

1940 - Covers with the **scarce Internment camp (31 mm ø)** Kienthal, Lenk, Wengen and Gstaad **without** "Franc de port" in cancel **but applied** by special rubber stamp.

1940 - Covers with **Swiss Internment Camp cancel (31 mm ø)** with **large Swiss cross, without** "Franc de port" **in cancel but applied** by special rubber stamp.

1940 - "**Militär-Intenierung, Schweiz**" cancel with **misspelled "Portorfei**" instead of "Portofrei"

1940 - Censored cover with seldom used **Swiss closing label on brown paper**.

1940 - **Covers** cancelled **"Speziallager 1**", "**Hospitalization militaire en Suisse, Leysin**", "**Bureau de renseignements**"

1940 - Seldom seen **Italian military unit cover** with "**Camp d'Internes Italiens Chiètres**" (Kerzers in German) and rubber stamp "**Savoia Cavalleria**".

1941 - Cover with rubber stamps "**Grangeneuve/Hauterive, Course universitaires**", "**Contraire au règlement"**

1942, 1943 - Covers from/to **Polish Internees in Switzerland** and **P.O.Box 260, London EC 1, (the Polish connection),** with **different** rubber stamps applied in England.

1944 - Cover from the **former Byelorussia** to a **Russian** Internee in Switzerland, **censored** by **OKW** in **both Königsberg (a) and Frankfurt (e)** as well as in Switzerland.

1945 - Regular postcard from a **Jewish refugee** just liberated from Concentration Camp Theresienstadt, now in Refugee Camp Aldliswil, with military censor mark "**Zensuriert"** since the camp was guarded by military. Also shown is the Nazi insignia **JUDE**" still worn on clothing when arrived in St.Gallen with this special train.

MAJOR REFERENCES:

It must be mentioned that the exhibitor was living in Switzerland between 1936 and 1946 as an "Emigrant" and was permitted by the Federal Police & Justice Department, because of his educational background, to work on farms during the war where also "detached" Italian and Polish Internees were permitted to work.

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